

# The Shadow of Turning

by Musgrove

Category: Star Wars  
Language: English  
Status: In-Progress  
Published: 1999-07-06 09:00:00  
Updated: 1999-07-06 09:00:00  
Packaged: 2016-04-27 10:40:57  
Rating: T  
Chapters: 1  
Words: 18,050  
Publisher: [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)  
Summary: Qui-Gon and his restless young apprentice are caught in a deadly web of revenge and hatred

## The Shadow of Turning

The Shadow of Turning

by Musgrove (Musgrove@astolat.demon.co.uk) \_\_\_\_

Summary: After a serious accident, Qui-Gon Jinn and his restless young apprentice are plunged into a web of revenge and hatred that could result in their deaths.... or worse.

Rating: PG-13, I guess. Some dark stuff and violence.

Characters / Setting: An adventure for Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan, about two years before Episode One. An adventure, but with angst. Lots and lots of angst. It's a bit more of an Obi-Wan story than a Qui-Gon one, perhaps, but Qui-Gon still features strongly.

Note: The Xanatos referred to in the first scene is Qui-Gon's previous apprentice, according to the Jedi Apprentice young adult novels (a great read for any adult fans of these two Jedi, too.) Qui-Gon placed all his trust and faith in the young man, and took his eventual turning to the dark side as a very personal betrayal. The experience made him very wary of taking on a new apprentice, afraid that the same thing would happen again.

Oh, and to any Welsh speakers out there: sorry for the evil joke of my hired thug's name. I started writing this story in Wales, and just had to do it.

Disclaimer: These people aren't mine. George Lucas owns them - all of them. I make no money out of this.

\*\*\*\*\*

There would be no safety here. The cold deadly blade of the lightsabre sliced into every corner of the cabin, moving in its merciless elegant dance, inescapable. Anyone hiding there, dagger in hand, perhaps, and murder in their heart, would see in its cold blue light, death - their death.

Obi-Wan Kenobi smiled, satisfied. Yes, he thought, there would truly be no safety for any foe he would meet, now or forever after. He could take on a dozen enemies and triumph, empowered by the Force and the never-resting skilful blade of his weapon. In all their long history, no foe had been the equal of a Jedi Knight. Only the Sith Lords had come close, it was said, though he had long since believed them to be nothing more than a legend created by the Masters as a terrible example of how the Dark Side leads to only to the destruction of those who use it.

But if they were true, if they existed...? What would it be like, not merely to deflect blaster bolts but to fight an equal - to fight sabre on sabre in deadly earnest, not just in training? Closing his eyes, he tried to envisage such a one, tightening his grip on his lightsabre in readiness. Images welled in the darkness - a black-clad warrior with eyes of steel and death in his smile, and, behind him, three silhouettes of dark lords yet more terrible, waiting for their time.

Smiling grimly, he swung his lightsabre into the darkness he had created - first a quick and delicate series of wrist-movements, playing with the end of his opponent's blade, then a stiff-armed killing blow delivered with all the strength of his body. Eyes closed, he saw his opponent fall. Power coursed through him and he smiled again; only the need for silence kept him from laughing aloud.

Triumphant, he called for the second Lord to step forward, to fight...

"You think you can kill me? You think you can triumph over the Dark Side?"

It hit him with the power of a physical blow. Obi-Wan opened his eyes; reality flooded around him like a crashing wave. He was alone in his cabin on a Republic starship, lightsabre in hand, fighting imaginary foes. He was alone, and yet... He swallowed. His triumph had disappeared utterly, leaving a vague creeping dread. \_The voice had seemed real.\_ The Dark Lord had been a creation of his imagination, but, unbidden by him, had seemed to rise from the floor, to reach for his lightsabre, to move in for the kill.

He dashed the back of his hand across his eyes. There was no dark figure on the floor, no voice. Yet, still, a pair of eyes watched him, silent, considering. The blue light of his lightsabre reflected in them, making them seem cold and deadly.

Obi-Wan knew what was coming. He knew he should bow his head, knew his lips should frame the required apology, but a defiant pride filled him, and he did nothing.

The eyes blinked slowly. Silence was a weapon.

His own breathing, loud and fast, seemed to fill the cabin. His

lightsabre was still ignited and would stay that way.

A quiet rustle, and Qui-Gon Jinn stepped forward into the ring of blue light. The lightsabre cast deep etched shadows on his face. For a second, Obi-Wan felt he was seeing the future - seeing his Master as he would be in his old age. For some reason, there was a deep aching sadness to that thought. He refused to feel it. A moment ago, he had felt a similarly inexplicable dread. That, too, would be ignored. Caught between conflicting emotions, discomforted by them, he did all he could: he went on the defensive.

He swallowed. "I thought you were asleep." Then, knowing it was no apology. "I never get to use it." There was no submission in his voice as he thrust the weapon forward in what was almost a hostile gesture.

Qui-Gon shook his head. "You know it's for..."

"Defence. Yes." Reflexively, Obi-Wan tightened his grip on the weapon, as if he feared his Master would strip him of it there and then. Deep down, he knew he probably deserved it. "We carry them. We negotiate. We use diplomacy. We always avert a fight. You do."

He knew he was making it worse, but how could he not? It had been a tedious year, going from one hollow diplomatic mission to another. The mission they were now en route for would be no different. No-one would listen to a mere apprentice, so he would do what he always did - stand at Qui-Gon's side, always silent, always ignored. He contributed nothing. He learnt nothing, too, for many of the missions had been pointless ones, mere ceremonial. He had never been more aware of his status. At least, fighting, he and Qui-Gon were equals, side by side, unstoppable. At least, fighting, he could make a difference.

But to say all this, to express it... Even to think it was not permissible.

The disappointment in his Master's face struck him like a physical blow, but Qui-Gon said nothing.

"I like fighting," Obi-Wan burst out, and it was almost a challenge. "I don't have your... your empathy with people. I'm not going to be a teacher, or even a good diplomat. But fighting..." He gestured with his weapon. "It is my strength. I enjoy it."

Qui-Gon was silent. Words were unnecessary; Obi-Wan knew what his Master would say. Fighting was sometimes a necessity, but never to be enjoyed; lives were to be spared unless there was no alternative. He knew it all - had been taught it since his earliest days. He knew it, knew he was in the wrong, but, yet... He could not feel sorry.

Impulsively, he reached out a hand, appealing to his Master. He had heard people talk, and knew Qui-Gon had been impulsive and rash as a young man. "You felt something of this when you were young?"

Qui-Gon turned away. There was no relaxing of the disappointment in his face, but he said nothing. Yet, somehow, as if their minds could

still touch even over the gaping gulf that had opened between them, Obi-Wan heard a single word: Xanatos.

He had never thought it could hurt him so much - but why should it not? To a padawan, his Master's approval was his whole world. "I won't turn, Master," he cried, his voice cracking on the last word. "I'm not him."

Qui-Gon turned back, and there was pain in his eyes, too. "I..."

He never got to finish. If his words were to be an affirmation of trust, or a rejection, Obi-Wan was never to know.

With a ear-splitting explosion, the ship jolted savagely. Obi-Wan was thrown off his feet, his lightsabre flying from his flailing grip. He crashed to the floor, hearing screams of twisted metal around him - hearing, most terribly of all, his Master's sudden cry of pain.

Hearing, then, silence...

"Master?"

He struggled to his feet, seeking in the darkness. Dimly, he heard the crew shouting, and a voice raised in terror, talking of an asteroid, and about attempting a controlled crash on the planet below, and how they would never make it, never...

"Master?"

His lightsabre was gone; there was no light from that source, or any other. Scared, he reached out with the Force, but couldn't quite grasp it. Fear clouded his mind, and the Force was beyond him - or maybe it had left him, deservedly punishing him for his defiance of his Master and his rejection of his training.

He tried again, louder, desperate. "Master?"

And he found him. His hand touched something soft, something far too still. His trembling fingers felt the contours of his Master's face - felt, too, the warm stickiness of blood on Qui-Gon's temple.

"Master? Master Qui-Gon?"

And then the ship jolted again, and again, and again, and it was as if the world was ending. Noise exploded around him. As if he were no more than a tiny child, he was thrown from his Master's side... and then he felt the red fire of pain, and it was everywhere in his body, without a centre, pushing him into a terrible darkness which was no rest at all.

His last thought was that he would die, with everything wrong between them, a failure. "Master," he murmured.

And then nothing.

\*\*\*\*

For Obi-Wan, it was the cold that awakened him, forcing him a black

unconsciousness where a dark man stalked him, reached for him, wanted him. Cold first, and then a simultaneous barrage on his senses - white merciless light above him through a jagged rent in the ceiling; blazing terrible pain in his chest, in his leg; an aching terrible loneliness. The last was the worst, the most fearful. He had seldom in all his life been truly alone, and never without the sense of other lifeforms close by.

"Master?"

He scrambled wildly with his hands, trying to find some way, any way, to raise himself up. The absence of his Master's sense was overwhelming. Always, before, Qui-Gon's sense had flowed around him, supporting him, filling him with a deep sense of home. Fierce and vibrant in battle, quiet and restful in sleep, yet always he was there. To be without the sense of his Master, hurt like this, was a fear greater than he could have imagined. Worse, far worse, was the knowledge that his last words had been in anger.

"Master?" There was almost a sob in his voice. His eyes clouded with unshed tears as he blinked at the sky through the gaping hole in the side of the ship. Oh, but it hurt so much, the loneliness, and the pain that all but robbed him of breath...

He shook his head sharply, dashed his hand across his eyes, and remembered his training. He was a Jedi. Even when no-one was watching, he should behave as a Jedi ought. The worst failure was the one you acknowledge in your own heart - and he knew he had failed. Qui-Gon would have shown no such weakness.

Focused now, gritting his teeth against the pain, he pushed himself up with his hands until he was sitting on the shattered remains of the cabin floor, where an age ago he had betrayed his Master by defeating an imaginary foe. Metal shifted around him, ugly and grating, and the sky of an alien planet gazed down at him, implacable.

"Master?" he called, again. Qui-Gon was his only thought; it seemed to him as if he could say no other word, for no other word was of any importance. He remembered finding him before... before it had happened. He remembered, too, the terrible feeling of his Master's blood on his hands. But where, where?

"Master Qui-Gon?" And, in silent desperation,

Twisted metal covered his legs, pinning him down, and he pawed at it now, struggling to free himself. It shifted... and then he almost passed out with the sudden assault of pain, like a fiery dagger penetrating his thigh to the bone. He bit his lip deeply; only sheer willpower kept him conscious. Focused only on finding his Master, he had barely paid any attention to his own body. He had known that he was hurt - that was inescapable - but how the pain could be eased or exacerbated had never occurred to him. Desperate to stay conscious, to find his Master, he gave it a distracted glance now, turning the Force inwards. Several ribs broken, making every breath an agonising battle; slow but steady bleeding inside his chest from the razor-sharp bones; a twisted knife of jagged metal deeply embedded in his thigh...

He didn't hesitate for even a second; hesitation would lead to fear.

Leaning forward, he grabbed the large sheet of metal, wrenching it up and away from his body in one brutal movement, pulling the deadly corner from his flesh. Blood bubbled from the wound; his vision clouded. Even braced for the pain as he was, he teetered on the edge of unconsciousness. Only the overwhelming knowledge that his Master needed him kept him from the darkness that almost seemed a living thing to him, calling to him, offering respite from the pain.

It was the hardest battle of his life, standing. Every breath was torture, every slightest movement of his leg, agony. In the freezing air of the planet, his breath condensed, and he started to shiver, every tremor causing the broken ribs to grate sickeningly. If he fell, he knew, they might pierce a lung, and he could die.

But he walked, shuffling like an old man, eyes darting desperately around the wrecked cabin, searching, searching for his Master.

He only needed to go a few steps. So close? Had his Master died so close to him? "Master Qui-Gon?" He dropped to his uninjured knee, blood-stained hands reaching out for his fallen Master, pushing away the debris that half-covered him. Even touching him, he sensed no consciousness there, though the older man's chest still rose and fell with shallow inaudible respirations. There was no blood on his robe that he could see, but dried blood matted Qui-Gon's hair, and fresh blood trickled down his forehead.

"Master!"

Instinct screamed at him to reach for him, to hold him, to beg him to open his eyes, to talk. Qui-Gon would take control, would make things better. He would save them all... but, first, he, Obi-Wan, would apologise - would see, once again, approval in his Master's eyes. Together, he felt, there was nothing they could not do. He saw them then, in a sudden flash of vision, lightsabres in hand, facing an evil greater than anything they had ever met... and defeating it.

Though the cost would be terrible.

He shook his head, banishing the image that was surely nothing more than a pain-induced mirage, a last echoing of the dark man who had haunted his unconsciousness. Fear was the path to the Dark Side, he knew, and it was fear alone that urged him to waken his Master. He was no longer a boy; he was a Jedi Knight, almost. For a Jedi, fear was not fitting. He was a Jedi, and he could act alone, without his Master's guidance... But, oh, how his heart cried out for it...

Wrenching his attention away from Qui-Gon, he cast about with the Force, desperately probing his surroundings. Of the pilots, he sensed nothing. Beyond the confines of the ship, though, he sensed the faint suggestion of human life. Focusing all his strength on it, he desperately reached out, struggling to know just what it was - friend or foe, hope... or death.

But it was too far, and he was too hurt. When, defeated, he broke the tenuous whisper of a touch, he was shaking, his vision clouded with lack of air. He realised with a sudden aching horror that any man less than a Jedi would likely have died from injuries such as his. Subconsciously, he had been using the Force just to keep breathing,

just to stay alive. If he was to get help, it would have to be blindly, walking through an unknown planet, heading for... what? That there was a cluster of people there, a few miles away, he knew. Whether they would kill him on sight, whether he was walking to his death... He clenched his fists. He would face that when he came to it.

If he came to it... Pain racked his body and mind; his chest felt torn apart with every breath; the freezing air scoured his skin. It was not being defeatist to admit that he could fail this, that he could die.

But he would die fighting to the very end.

"Master," he murmured, stroking Qui-Gon's face, "I... I don't want to leave you, but I'm getting help." Then, hoping desperately that the injured man could feel the intensity of his thoughts. "I'm sorry, Master."

Impulsively, he removed his brown cloak, laying it gently over his injured Master. It was a tiny gesture, he knew, but such small things could make the difference between life and death. Above the unconscious man, through the gaping rent, freezing air flooded in, colder by the minute as the sky began to darken towards the unknown horror of its night.

He closed his eyes for a moment, mentally seeking to focus all his strength, stood up, and began to walk.

\*\*\*\*

Across the frozen forest, the black-clad man smiled.

It was marvellous how fate played into his hands. Years, now, he had bided his time, slowly building up his strength on this backwater planet, ever preparing for the moment of sweet revenge on the Jedi. Revenge was an all-encompassing obsession with him, fuelling his every action, almost his every thought. His hatred burned like a pillar of fire, deadly and unquenchable. Without revenge, he had no life. Without revenge, he was nothing.

And now fate, or the dark side of the Force he had so eagerly embraced over the years, had delivered.

His instruments had monitored the desperate attempt of the crippled craft, of course, though he had observed it only as a formality, only vaguely interested. After the ship had crashed, he had reached out lazily with the Force to sense if there were any survivors, anyone who could present a threat or could be persuaded to serve him. He had reached out... and gasped, all his senses instantly alert.

Two humans had died at the moment of impact, and he had felt their puny presences blink out even as he had touched them. But they were insignificant, nothing. It was the other two... ah, the other two...

He smiled again, remembering. Then, when he had first sensed them, he had laughed aloud. For years he had hidden, planning revenge on the Jedi... and now they had come. Both of them were wounded, one of them deep in unconsciousness, his presence in the Force imperceptible. It

was only the desperate mental calling of the other one that told him of his existence at all.

But the other one, hurt, scared, ripe for turning... What a revenge \_that\_ would be - to turn the apprentice before the Master's eyes, then kill the Master.

Snapping into action, he reached for his comlink. His dream would become a reality, and soon.

"Sir?" Araf Mawr's voice came in instant response, alert and eager. For all the powers available to him, his strength came in making his men love him, never from fear. Araf Mawr and the others would die for him.

And kill for him.

Pressing a button, he transmitted the location of the wrecked craft. "Take half a dozen men - no, a dozen." Even badly injured, Jedi were formidable indeed. "Use stealth. Surprise them if you can. There are two already dead: ignore these. The other two are alive, but injured. I want them to stay that way. You may hurt them more if you wish, but do not kill them. I will trust your judgement on when to stop. Then bring them to me. Do \_not\_ tell them who I am."

No. He would use the Force to shield himself from them, leaving them in ignorance. Let them fear, let them dread what was to come. Let them struggle to find that hated Jedi calm and acceptance.

Yes, above all, let them fear.

And then, when he was finished with them, they could find that his reality was worse than \_anything\_ they could fear.

\*\*\*\*

It had never been so hard just to put one foot in front of the other, just to stay upright, just to live. But he had to live - he had to.

Obi-Wan was beyond cold, now; past shivering. It was a relief of sorts, even though it meant that death was close now. The cold numbed the pain, and slowed the steady stream of blood from his thigh to a trickle. He had lost too much blood already; from his thigh to his boots, his clothes were soaked entirely red. Every shiver that had racked him had set the broken ribs grating together in a terrible and agonising pain. Now his body was still, numbed, and the pain had slipped away. The cold was saving him; soon it would kill him.

He had lost all track of distance, of direction. He saw nothing but the next step. Every step he took was a goal in itself, and a victory.

Pausing for a moment, now, he moved his head sluggishly, his eyelids heavy, his senses dull. His lips moved in a desperate attempt to speak, to call for help, though who would hear him? Even if someone was there, they would hear nothing from him; his frozen lips, his parched throat, could utter no sound. Instead, he called out wildly with his thoughts: A Jedi did not beg, but to save his Master he would do anything - and to live long enough himself to hear his



Master forgive him.

he pleaded again. He was too weak now to reach out and locate the presences he had located earlier; all his Force abilities were expended on keeping himself alive. A settlement was out there somewhere, but where? He stifled a wrenching sob and cried out silently again.

And someone answered.

It was not a voice, not a promise of reassurance... not like anything he had ever felt before. It had something of the feel of his Master. The smallest touch of this mind was warmth in the darkness. It offered home, and healing, and firelight. It offered hope.

But even as he thought it, he knew it was not Qui-Gon Jinn. This was something else entirely. He craved to know it, even as he feared it. There was power here. It was no small thing to touch a stranger's mind.

And then, as quickly as it had come, it blinked out. Darkness is never more intense than in the very moment after a light is extinguished. In the sudden absence of the presence, the cold hit him like a gaping black void, and the loneliness, oh the loneliness...

He wanted his Master desperately - his Master, or that unknown mysterious voice. He wanted a parent, a master, a leader. He wanted to be a child, without responsibility, able to rest. Oh, how he needed to rest...

But he could not.

Shakily, he took one step, then another.

He blinked with surprise when he found himself on his knees, unable to comprehend for a moment that he had fallen. A moment later, his body hit the ground, and he lay beyond all comprehension, utterly still.

In his unconsciousness, there were dreams...

\*\*\*\*

For the merest fraction of a second before he regained consciousness, Qui-Gon Jinn thought he heard his apprentice desperately calling, calling for help. A moment later, fully in a consciousness that was nothing but cold and pain, there was only silence.

"Obi-Wan?" he called, his voice hoarse. His head throbbed mercilessly; one whole side of his face was stiff with dried blood. Framing words was so difficult. He tried again. "Obi-Wan? Are you there?"

Nothing. Of his apprentice there was no sound, and no sense.

Slowly, gingerly, he pushed himself into a sitting position, fighting the dizziness that threatened to push him back into the darkness. He blinked, struggling to overcome the double vision. For the first time

he became fully aware of his surroundings - of the shattered, torn wreckage that had once been their quarters; of the darkening sky above him; of the extra cloak that fell from him as he moved; of the blood...

The sight of it was like a cold fist tightening on his heart. The blood was everywhere, and he knew instantly that little of it was his - knew, too, with a terrible certainty, whose it was. A twisted panel lay on the floor, one wicked deadly corner drenched with blood. Bloody handprints were smeared on the metal, on his clothes, on the floor, and, most chilling of all, a large pool of blood was already beginning to freeze, close to where his head had lain.

The Force could produce ghosts, sometimes - after-images of strong emotions or pain. It took little for Qui-Gon to sense the pain his apprentice had felt as he had knelt in this spot, bleeding heavily, begging his Master to awaken, bracing himself to face what he believed could be his own death. "Master," he had implored, as he had given up his own cloak and prepared to face the frozen world without it. "Master..."

But he, Qui-Gon, has remained within the repose of unconsciousness, deaf to his apprentice's call. He had sworn to protect Obi-Wan, yet he had left him cruelly alone, perhaps had killed him.

That he had not done so deliberately did nothing to change matters, to excuse him. A Jedi Master was a being strong in the living Force, inextricably bonded with his apprentice. No unconsciousness should be too deep to hear such a call. Had their disagreement caused a rift so wide that it had severed in an instant their bond of years? Had he, so quick to accuse Obi-Wan of giving in to anger, acted in anger himself, subconsciously withdrawing from his apprentice, shutting his mind to his calls? Guilt twisted in him like a knife.

But there was no time for it - no time for reproach, though he so greatly deserved it. Somewhere, out there, in the cold and desperately hurt, was Obi-Wan, though he could not sense him. Pulling himself fully to his feet, he prepared to follow.

If there was any advance warning through the Force of his attackers' approach, he had missed it, lost deep in thought and reproach. To Qui-Gon Jinn, distracted, the sudden barrage of blaster fire came from nowhere, catching him unawares. His lightsabre was still at his belt. He had barely begun to reach for it when the first bolts ripped through the weakened hull of the craft, and, outside, a voice called on him to surrender.

Grimly, Qui-Gon Jinn prepared to fight, alone.

\*\*\*\*

Obi-Wan Kenobi was trapped in a nightmare - aware, yet without the power to move, even to speak. The dark voices of unconsciousness had claimed him for an unknown while; the touch of hands on his body, lifting, had roused him, forcing him into this terrible prison of semi-consciousness. Someone was carrying him, but he lacked even the strength to open his eyes, to see.

he asked, silently. Even in his thoughts, it was little more than a whisper. But, even disappointed in his apprentice as he was, Qui-Gon

would never bear him thus without a reassuring touch or word, without a sense of his comforting presence wrapping around him like a blanket.

He tried again.

Nothing. Whoever was carrying him made no sign of hearing. Obi-Wan reached out desperately with the Force, but there was nothing there. Hands were carrying him, and he could hear the steady tread of feet beneath him, but he could sense no humanity - none at all.

With rising panic, he reached out for his surroundings, seeking anything - animal, bird, or the sense of the frost-encrusted trees. Nothing. All nothing. He was blind.

For the first time in his life, he was alone in his mind. For the first time in his life, the Force had left him.

\*\*\*\*

Qui-Gon Jinn held his lightsabre in both hands, focused intently on the present, on the nuances of the living Force that ebbed and flowed around him. Around a dozen men, he surmised, and all armed, surrounded the wrecked ship. He sensed hostility with no great intelligence, but, beyond that, he could tell little. Not even a Jedi Master could sense specific thoughts from an unwilling stranger - or would not, for a Jedi always had the potential for powers far greater than the Light Side permitted them to use. Even with the closest bonds of his life - with his Master, first, and then with his apprentices - shared thoughts had been a rare pleasure. With Xanatos, he knew now, the sharing had all been on his side, while his apprentice had given nothing. With Obi-Wan, though, the connection was rich and flowed both ways. They worked well together.

With a sudden fierce determination, he swore that he would do anything to ensure that they would work together in the future, too, until Obi-Wan became a Knight, and perhaps beyond, too, as equals.

Yes, he would live. A Jedi did not run from a fight, but neither did a Jedi take unnecessary lives. There were twelve of them. If he fought, some of them would die. If he fought, wounded and dizzy as he was, he would die, and, if he died, what chance had Obi-Wan?

He would not fight.

"Surrender! You won't be hurt." The voice was close now, and still he stood, lightsabre in hand, unmoving. The fire of a blaster bolt slashed across the sky above him, then another.

He frowned, grimly. He would not fight, but neither would he surrender. Crouching down, he slashed with his lightsabre - a firm sweeping movement, slashing through the weakened metal of the cabin floor. Again he slashed, and again...

In the adjacent cabin, metal clattered as his assailants forced their entry. Their voices were hollow, and he could hear their footsteps.

Silently, he switched off his lightsabre, lest the green glow alert them to his presence. Clipping it to his belt, he lowered himself into the hole he had cut. He had intended to pull some of the loose wreckage over it, concealing his exit, but they were too close now, getting ever closer. Instead, he did the only thing that was left to him - reaching out with the Force to the man in front, planting the suggestion of a sudden movement on the other side of the ship. Then he silently levitated the blood-stained metal panel and lowered it across the hole, his mind reeling as it touched the blood, as it felt the after-image of his apprentice's ebbing life force. His head throbbed mercilessly, and he felt sick. How easy it was to touch that stranger mind, yet how far away and unresponsive he had been to Obi-Wan's call...

Footsteps echoed, close for a moment, then fading. They would come back, he knew.

Trusting to the Force, he lay still for a moment to calm the pounding in his head, then began to crawl.

\*\*\*\*

His Master's approval was his whole world, was all he lived for. Araf Mawr had never failed him before - had never before felt this terrible aching fear. Never, too, had there been this intense burning anger and hatred. His failure had not been his fault.

The memory of the communication with his Master still hurt like a physical pain. The Master had known what had happened, of course - he always did - but still he had made him recount every last detail of the sorry tale. They had arrived at the crash site, he had told him, only to find that the two men had already gone.

"Already?" his Master had asked. "You used stealth as I ordered?"

Twelve armed men against two injured ones... No. Despite orders, he had considered stealth unnecessary, and would pay the price. Yet, even so, he still believed that it had made no difference. His men had surrounded the craft; no-one had left. He had offered to track the fugitives, to atone that way, but his offer had been tersely rejected. "I'll send someone who can succeed," his Master had said, tersely. "You are to return to base at once."

After the communication had ended, Araf Mawr had stood silent, contemplating. Without his Master's approval, all was dark. If he could capture the fugitives, he could live in the light again. For every minute he lived in the darkness of his Master's anger he would extract a scream of agony from his prisoners.

Tightening his grip on his blaster, Araf Mawr sent his men home, defied his Master, and went hunting.

\*\*\*\*

The black-clad man reclined in his chair and smiled.

A cat toys with its prey before killing it, and so would he. The older Jedi's escape had not been planned, and Araf Mawr would suffer for it, but it was perhaps a blessing in disguise. Let him enjoy his

puny victory; let him walk himself into frozen exhaustion even as his apprentice had done before him. Let him feel hope, only for eventual defeat to be all the more crushing.

And the Jedi \_would\_ be defeated.

Already, he had touched the mind of the younger one, planting the first seeds of the triumphant harvest he would soon reap. The boy was beyond reach of his sense, now, his mind crippled even as his body was, but, soon, he would not be beyond the reach of his honeyed words. Already, his men were en route for the place the dying Jedi lay, and they would bring him to him... and he would save him.

And destroy him.

\*\*\*\*

Was this truly consciousness? Obi-Wan could hear voices, and feel pain, but that was all. Consciousness should bring awareness of the Force - an instant sense of his own body and his surroundings. It was as natural, as unthinking, as breathing. Life without Force sense was no life at all. It was being blind, and deaf, and totally utterly lost.

It was the most terrifying experience of his life.

He opened his eyes, and scanned his surroundings with rising panic. Without the Force, what dark imaginings could torment him? Unseen and unsensed, an enemy could be standing behind him, and he would be ignorant right until the very moment the knife slashed across his throat.

But there was no-one there. Qui-Gon was not there. He saw a small sparsely-furnished room, silver moonlight slanting in through one small window. He saw a wooden door, and blood-stained footprints on the floor. He saw the thick pile of rough-woven blankets that covered him, and his own pale hands resting on them, unnaturally pale. One wrist throbbed mercilessly, and had been tightly bound with white cloth, though he had no memory of being hurt there. Of the pain of his other injuries, there was no lessening, though he was no longer cold. Every breath was still torture.

But Qui-Gon was not there.

"You should sleep."

He gasped, whipping his head round, back to the door. He had looked away for only seconds, yet had neither sensed the newcomer's approach, nor heard the door opening. With sudden terror, he realised the full extent of his impotence. He had come to rely too much on the Force, letting his other senses atrophy. The loss of the Force did not merely reduce him to the level of a regular man; it made him \_less\_ than a regular man.

"You have a lot of healing to do. It will not be easy."

It was a young woman, her hair dark, her skin pale in the moonlight. She stood in the doorway, half holding back, as if shy of him, afraid to approach closer.

"Wh...?" He cleared his throat, then was unable to suppress a groan as the sharp movement sent a bolt of pain through his chest. At last it subsided enough to talk. "Where am I?"

"My father found you. He brought you home. We thought you would die."

There was a strange lack of emotion in her voice - or did all voices sound like this, flat, without the promptings of the Force giving them richness, emotion? He was a man accustomed to seeing in colour, suddenly seeing only in black and white. He could not read her at all. People used body language, he knew, and conveyed fine nuances of meaning by their tone of voice. He had observed them lazily, never learning to read them, feeling only their sense through the Force. There could be murder behind her soft gaze, and he would never know.

He struggled to calm his rising panic. Inner calm; control. He needed no Force to master his own emotions. Oh, but it was difficult... His mind cried out for a reassuring touch. How did people who weren't Force-sensitive live for the loneliness?

She spoke again. "The others were looking for you, too, but my father found you first." Suddenly she took a step forward, and he thought there was a spark of real emotion in her voice. "Who are you? Why is he interested in you?"

"Who is 'he'?" But he had a hazy memory of a presence reaching out to him, and thought he knew.

She hesitated for a moment, as if judging her words carefully. "This world is called Embar. Have you heard of us?" He shook his head, and she continued. "It's a colony, of sorts - many townships all independent. We came here from all over the galaxy, drawn only by a desire for a simple life. We live close to nature, using no technology. The Republic knows of us, and has promised to leave us alone, neither visiting us, nor making contact." Her face darkened. "It keeps its promise; others do not."

For a long time she was silent. Her eyes were distant, as if lost in painful memory. He said nothing to prompt her - indeed, he was barely listening. The absence of his Master's presence was overwhelming.

"There are bandits," he said, at last, "and slavers, taking our people. They knew we don't use weapons, and that the Republic will do nothing to protect us. We suffered great losses. My mother...." She swallowed hard, and her face was like stone. "Then he came."

Her face was unreadable. Despite himself, he found himself asking: "He?"

"He came several years ago." There was something in her eyes as she spoke of him. Fear? Admiration? He could not tell. "Our planet suited his needs, he said. Our world could help him: he could help us. He asked our permission to stay here. Many of us objected, but when the slavers attacked us and he saved us..." She shrugged. "Well, he's here now, and we are safe. Not everyone approves, of course. He uses weapons, space travel. Restless young men from our community join him sometimes. He is building an army, but it only for protection of

those who can't protect themselves - who the Republic won't protect."

"I want to meet him." He was surprised by the sudden longing he felt. All he could think was that someone powerful had touched his mind just before he had lost the Force, and that maybe he could help him find it again.

Her face darkened. "His men were looking for you, and another, too. My father heard them fire weapons in the direction of your ship."

"Master!" he gasped. Horror and shame flooded him, that he had not asked before. He had thought of Qui-Gon after wakening, but selfishly, longingly, needing a Master who would make things better, would ease the loneliness. His mind was clouded; he had to fight to remember every detail of his Master's face. "I have to..."

He struggled to push himself up. He would have run from that door in an instant, but there she was at his side, soft hand on his shoulder, pushing him back. As pain consumed his chest and he struggled in vain for the Force to ease it, she slipped her other hand behind his neck, gently lowering him to the bed. "You'd die," she murmured, and her eyes were shining, almost as if she was close to tears.

"Master..." he whispered, again. "Did they...?"

"I'm sorry." Slowly, she withdrew her hands. She did not look at him. "There was no-one alive there. Two bodies, but no-one alive."

"Two?" The pilots.

He only felt relief for a second. If Qui-Gon wasn't there, alive or dead, then where was he?

\*\*\*\*

Araf Mawr smiled, his blaster held tightly in his hand, ready.

It had been so easy to track his prey, in a silver full moon that was almost like day. The man walked with a slump in his shoulders, never looking back, never showing the slightest awareness that any danger could be stalking him. Occasionally he would pause and just stand there motionless, as if lost in thought, or listening intently - though, once, Araf Mawr had stepped on a twig just as the man had paused, and the man had made no sign of hearing him. Not listening, then, but what?

The man was tracking, too. In the immediate vicinity of the wrecked ship, his trail had twisted around, ducked behind trees, and spiralled, as if he was trying to throw off any pursuit. Now, though, he was foolishly satisfied that he was not being followed, and he walked in a straight line, following the trail of blood on the ground, and the recent footprints. One, injured, had gone on alone; now the second was trailing him.

And he, Araf Mawr, was trailing them both.

The man had no weapon, though he kept flexing his right hand, as if

he was used to bearing one and was unconsciously seeking it. With his left hand, he clutched the two robes he wore, pulling them close to his body, as if feeling the cold. His head seemed to sag lower with every step. Every moment watching his quarry's weariness made the anticipated victory all the more sweet.

Only once had his prey shown any sign of real life, starting into an instant alertness as if startled by.... by nothing Araf Mawr could see, or hear. He had raised his head, like an animal scenting the air, then darted behind a tree, crouching down. Araf Mawr had blinked, passed his hand across his eyes. The man's brown cape had almost seemed to flicker, to blend into the surroundings. His conscious mind had known that the man was still there, but his eyes had been unable to see him.

It had been a full minute before he had heard it too - the noise of men approaching. He had drawn back himself, too, ducking down into the undergrowth, only just in time. Two men from the township, from his former home, had walked past on all-but-silent feet, they too following the bloody trail, though in the opposite direction. He hadn't breathed, and they had passed.

It had been a lucky guess, of course, that the man had heard their coming so early. A stray gust of wind, perhaps, taking their words and carrying them to his ears. After their passing, he had stepped out from the invisibility of his tree, sighed deeply, and continued to walk, his head down, exhaustion in his every movement.

And now he was on his knees on the ground, left hand outstretched before him, fingers brushing the ground. Araf Mawr was close now - close enough to hear the soft moan of pain that issued from the man's throat.

Close enough, too, to see the man raise slowly upwards; close enough to see the man's fingers, red with blood....

It was time. Raising his blaster, aiming low at the man's back, he fired.

\*\*\*\*

"Is he very important to you?" the girl murmured. Obi-Wan thought it was regret that he saw in her eyes, or even guilt, but he was probably wrong. Her eyes were very blue.

"He is my Master," he said, simply. Then, knowing that no-one in the universe could comprehend the closeness of the bond between a Master and an apprentice, both strong in the Force, he tried again, using the only word that came close. "He is my father."

"Then he'll find you." She touched the back of his hand for the tiniest of moments. "He's not dead."

A sudden wild hope sparked in him. "You sense him?"

She shook her head. "No. I have no Force ability. None of us do."

He was surprised she had heard of it. Most people were ignorant of the Force. They looked upon the Jedi as magicians, seeing only their



actions, never seeing the Force that was behind them and around them and everywhere.

"You're a Jedi, aren't you?" she asked, suddenly. "That's why he wants you. He is one too. It must be so lonely."

"I've lost the Force." It came out almost as a sob. He had not meant to say it at all, but she was close, and her skin was smooth, and there could be no guile behind a face like that. "I don't know why."

She closed her eyes, as if considering. They remained closed as she spoke, her voice tight. "There was a bite mark on your wrist when my father found you - a spider, perhaps. Many of them are venomous, some fatal. Maybe the venom affects people like you by depriving them of the...." And then she shook her head abruptly. Her eyes snapped open. "It's just an idea. Doesn't sound right. I... I don't know why you've lost it."

Something screamed inside him that she was lying. He suppressed it brutally. Loss of the Force was no reason to suspect everyone. She had cared for him, consoled him... touched him in his loneliness.

"He might know." As if hearing his thought, she touched him again, gently, on his cheek. He could feel that her fingers were shaking. "We can do nothing for you here, but there is nothing he can not do. He can heal your body, so why not your mind?" She laid her hand on his brow. "Does it hurt very much?" she asked, sounding suddenly very young, almost scared.

He could lie, and spare her, but what was the point? "Yes," he said, simply. He meant it as a gesture of trust, by letting her see his weakness, his honesty.

"I... I don't know if you trust me." She looked shy, her cheeks reddening. "I've brought a drink. It... It can work well to ease pain. You don't have to drink it."

He remembered he had seen unshed tears in her eyes, once. He didn't want to see them again. "I would like that," he said, simply. Pain was crushing his chest between a hammer and an anvil; his leg was lanced through with fire. He could barely think for the pain, and he needed to think. The sooner he was healed, the sooner he could find his Master.

She smiled, and the sight of it was like nothing he had ever experienced. He felt it in his chest, like physical pain.

"It's strong. Just have a little."

Her hand snaked behind his neck, her slight arms supporting his upper body with a strength he would not have suspected. Her other hand held the cup. As he reached for it to steady it, to guide it to his mouth, their fingers touched for a moment. His hand moved away; hers followed and closed round his. Together they raised the cup to his lips. The taste was warm and sweet, fragrant, like herbs.

"He can help you," she whispered again, as she lowered his head to the pillow.

"He can find Qui-Gon," he murmured. Sleep, or unconsciousness, was coming in sudden dark waves, inexplicable.

"He may have already found him," she said, quietly, "one way or the other."

\*\*\*\*

Araf Mawr had a moment of utter incomprehension:

Then, he started fighting for his life.

He had been so certain of victory, his blaster trained on the unsuspecting back of an almost-unconscious man. Then, in an instant, everything had changed.

It had taken only a fraction of a second between the trigger being depressed and the blaster bolt reaching its target. In that time, the man's hand had darted to his waist, pulled out a blade of burning green light, whirled around.... and sent the bolt straight back at him. Only a wild desperate dive to the ground had saved him, then. A second time, and he would not be so lucky.

He knew now that this would be his last sight - an implacable-eyed warrior advancing steadily towards him through a hail of blaster bolts, unharmed. He was invincible; he walked through death. Araf Mawr was firing wildly, constantly, but the man's glowing blade caught them all, sending them safely away. A tree sizzled as a blast caught it. Apart from that first one, the man never sent a bolt straight back at him, though it was just a matter of time before he did, or before his deadly weapon found its home. His eyes were intense and dead, as if he barely saw his opponent - or barely saw his humanity.

The man was close, now; he could feel the heat of the blade. His mind screamed in terror. All he could think was that this was just not supposed to happen. It was to have been an easy capture. He had looked to see a broken, wounded mortal; he had found another like his Master.

Dropping the blaster from his nerveless fingers, falling to his knees in terror, he surrendered to the implacable eyes of his enemy and prepared to meet his death.

\*\*\*\*

The black-clad man splashed cooling water on his face. His hands were shaking. Never before had he had to exercise so much mental control, to wield so much power. He was shielding himself from one powerful mind, all the while maintaining contact with another broken one. Even with the young man's terribly weakened state, it took all of his concentration to do what he was doing. The mind he had been touching was normally a vibrant one, strong in the Force. Had the boy not passed into unconsciousness when he did, he might have lost his grip on him, exhausted.

He hadn't much time.

But all the threads were coming together. The young man would not

awaken for hours, leaving him with plenty of time to draw the disparate elements together, to set the stage for his destruction - his destruction, and his Master's after him.

Taking a last look around the study, he left the room on silent feet. When he returned to this room, perhaps, he would have a young man's soul in his blood-stained hands and victory would be his.

\*\*\*\*

Qui-Gon Jinn looked down dispassionately at man who grovelled on the ground before him. Silver moonlight mixed with the green light of his weapon, casting a sickly pallor onto the man's face.

"Who sent you?" he demanded. He held the sabre point at the man's throat.

"Master," the man sobbed. "He has no other name. He's... He's like you."

He breathed in sharply. A sudden terrible suspicion seized him... and then was gone, and he could not catch it, could barely remember it. "Like me? What do you mean? He looks like me?"

"He's like you - a magician. He told us he couldn't die - like you."

Oh, how he wished it was true. Jedi died. He had seen so many die, and the Force was failing, producing fewer and fewer new initiates, and seeing more and more fail along the way and never become Knights. He knew the Council was worried that there was something deeply wrong in the Republic, in the Jedi order... or even in the balance of the Force itself.

Oh yes. Jedi could die.

"Where's Obi-Wan?" he asked sharply. As he told his apprentice so often, the present should always take priority over regretting the past, or anticipating the future. The past could not be changed; the future depending only on the present, on sensing the here and now, on acting. He told Obi-Wan this so often, but believing it, acting upon it himself, was so difficult. He pushed the blade a fraction closer to the man's flesh. "Where's the man I was travelling with?"

"I don't know," the man shouted. "I don't know!"

Qui-Gon reached out tentatively, and thought he could read truthfulness in the man's sense, but he didn't dare probe too closely. The brief blaster fight had left him more exhausted than he would ever let the man see, his head throbbing terribly, and even the smallest use of the Force was a great effort.

Instead, he decided to believe the man. He withdrew the blade from the man's throat, knelt down beside him, and raised the weapon above his head.

"I'm sorry," he murmured, "but I can't have you following me."

He put all the force of his arm behind the downward swing.

\*\*\*\*

Obi-Wan was floating in black water. It mired around him like a living thing, entwining round his ankles, pouring down his throat, cold and sickening, filling his lungs...

He could see the surface above him, bright and beautiful. Sunlight slanted down on the surface of the water, though little of it could penetrate its deadly depths. The sun itself appeared like a many-faceted jewel, infinitely beautiful, immensely strong. He knew his life depended on reaching out, on touching that sunlight, but he could not move - he could not remember how to move. He knew instinctively that he was not paralysed; movement was still a skill he possessed. The black water had stolen his memory of how to do it.

And then, beyond the sunlight, warped by the thick water, he heard his Master's voice. "I can't have you following me..."

he called with his mind, desperately.

But the pull of the black water was stronger, so much stronger, and he was totally enveloped in its grasping fingers.

A moment later, and the light, and his Master's voice, had disappeared utterly.

\*\*\*\*

Qui-Gon Jinn walked slowly into the small town, mists of dizziness swelling at the edge of his vision. He felt no sense of his apprentice's presence, but the trail had appeared to lead here, and he would not rest until he had found him. He had touched the small pool of blood where Obi-Wan had lain, but had felt only the tiniest sense that his apprentice had ever been alive there. Beyond that point, someone else had carried him - that was for certain. Whether the young man had been alive or dead, he couldn't tell. His only hope was the knowledge that corpses don't bleed.

Grimly, he kept his hand on his lightsabre, ready at his belt. He had struck one blow already - necessary, though he could feel no pride in it. If he had to, he would strike more in the same manner, though it was not what he had been trained to do.

He walked past silent houses, some with flickering candle light in the windows, warm and yellow. He passed horses, and dogs. He felt eyes watching him from the unlit windows, and sensed hostility, though, strangely, no real threat.

But, still, there was no sense of Obi-Wan.

Taking a deep breath, he decided to trust to the Force. He pushed his cloak back; should the Force guide his hand to his lightsabre, there would be no encumbering cloth to slow it down. That was the only defence he took. Instead, he slowly raised his hands, palms outwards to show that they were empty. He knew people were watching him, now, for certain.

He raised his voice, letting it carry to all the silent listeners. "I am looking for my... for a friend." He stressed the last word, hoping

against expectation that Obi-Wan would hear it and know that any rift between them was in the past now. "He's been badly hurt, and I believe someone brought him here." No answer. "I thank you for taking care of him." Nothing. "All I want is to be with him. I won't trouble you. I mean no harm."

And, one by one, figures stepped from the darkness.

\*\*\*\*

Qui-Gon bowed his throbbing head, despairing.

He had never felt anything like it - never heard of anything like it. It was as if a thick wall had been built around his apprentice's mind, completely severing it from the Force. Touching Obi-Wan's pale and unresponsive form, he had tried again and again, closing his eyes, reaching in with the Force... and hitting a barrier that was almost a physical wall. He had been assured that the young man had been conscious a while before, talking and making sense, so he knew Obi-Wan's mind was still intact. But, "he said he couldn't use the Force," the young woman had said. "He was frightened by it, I think."

Now, pulling away after yet another failed attempt, knowing that another attempt would probably push him over into unconsciousness himself, he came to the conclusion that only Obi-Wan himself could break the barrier. If he was stronger, perhaps he could force his way through, but he had no guarantee that Obi-Wan's mind would survive it. How it had happened, he couldn't begin to guess, but, somehow, Obi-Wan had lost the power to access his Force abilities. He remembered hearing about people who saw something so traumatic that they became blind. Perhaps Obi-Wan had sensed something that had terrified him deeply - deeply enough that, in self-defence, his mind had erected this barrier. Perhaps he had sensed his own impending death...

Or perhaps he, Qui-Gon, had pushed his apprentice to this point, when he had all-but accused him of being about to turn to the Dark Side. Perhaps Obi-Wan, badly hurt and unable to think clearly, had become terrified to use any Force, lest it lead to the Dark Side...

He shook his head. Whatever it was, his apprentice was beyond his help. Were the young man conscious, perhaps, he could ease some of his pain, or reach in for a while and support his terribly damaged ribs and allow him to breathe freely. Perhaps... He had little healing skill himself, and his own strength was almost drained.

And so he did what he could. If he could not help Obi-Wan, he could at least get help, could ease his mind when he awakened.

His hand still on the young man's brow, he turned towards the door. The young girl was no longer there, but her father was, frowning with concern. He had sensed warring emotions in the girl; in the man there was only sincerity. "If he awakens when I'm away, tell him I called him padawan," he said, holding the man with the intensity of his gaze. "Tell him that I love him."

The last thing he did before moving away was to take Obi-Wan's cloak from his own shoulders, and gently return it to its owner. Obi-Wan had sought to give his Master the gift of life, and now the gift

would be repaid.

\*\*\*\*

"We're sorry. We really can't allow it."

The Council leader's face was sympathetic, but unyielding. Qui-Gon had gone before the town's Council as a petitioner, humbling himself for his apprentice's life, yet unyielding, too, demanding that the Council convene way past dusk to hear his plea. Their craft was wrecked, he explained, and far beyond repair. Perhaps the pilots had had time to get a distress signal out, but he doubted it - and Obi-Wan's condition was too perilous to take the chance of waiting. They were without transport and communication, in a community without technology, without anything but the most rudimentary medical care.

"Fate had decided it," they had said. "Men interferes with it too much, intervening against nature, using unnatural technology. Our community is founded on the rejection of all that. Are the Jedi no longer taught to respect a culture's own beliefs, however they conflict with his own?"

Knowing he had been treading dangerously close to the edges of legitimacy, he had refused to back down. Surely the settlers had not burnt all their boats when they had colonised this planet, he had argued. Surely, somewhere, unused, there were some way to contact the Republic. They need contradict none of their beliefs. He alone would make the transmission, arranging for the rescue ship to land far outside the town, where none of them need see it.

"We're sorry. We really can't allow it."

He noticed the phrasing. 'Can't allow it' implied that he was right, and that they did have a way to communicate off-planet. No- one said it was impossible. If necessary, later, he could chose the weakest of them and persuade him to lead him to the device. It would be an action of dubious morality, done only as a last resort, but the ends sometimes justified the means.

For now he tried another tack. "A man attacked me with a blaster," he said, sharply. "Who was he?"

The sudden awkwardness in the atmosphere was almost palpable. He heard one Council member drawn in a breath, as if ready to speak, but the leader silenced him with a firm stare. "We... co-exist with those people," he said, slowly. "Many of us dislike it, but the situation is necessary. He protects us, but we do not condone what he does."

"Protects you?" he almost shouted. "So you oppose all technology, yet you tolerate this man using lethal weapons, while refusing to let me save a man's life?" He gave a derisive laugh, feeling real anger for the first time. "I don't much care for your principles."

He thought that, perhaps, some of them looked a little guilty, but once again the leader silenced them with the force of his gaze. "Then go to him for help," he said, tersely.

\*\*\*\*

When, dejected, Qui-Gon returned to his injured apprentice's room a short time later, the young man had disappeared.

\*\*\*\*

Qui-Gon Jinn held the girl tightly, his fingers digging into her flesh. He felt an anger greater than he had for many years. A Jedi learnt not to hate his enemy, not to feel anger but to fight from a state of calm, at one with the Force. It was one of the hardest lessons an apprentice had to learn. Seeing evil in the world, their natural impulse was to hate the perpetrator. Hate, though, was the path to the dark side. A Jedi worked to counter the effects of evil, and the causes, never directly to get revenge on the evil-doer.

Stupidity, though, was harder to forgive. Anger blazed in him, scarcely under control.

"Why?" he shouted. "You knew I was here. Why did you let them take him?"

There were tears in her eyes. Belatedly realising he was hurting her, he relaxed the pressure on her shoulders. It did something to calm him, to remind him of the dangerous path he was treading. He breathed deeply, and some of the anger fell away. "Why?" he demanded again, but this time his voice was quiet, intense.

"I was thinking of him," she sobbed. "We could do so little for him here. I knew he would have better medical facilities. I ran all the way there and begged them to come here, to collect him. I spoke to the Master himself. He agreed at once." She glanced anxiously at her father. "I know we're not supposed to have contact with them, but I felt I had to do it. I... I like him. I don't want him to die. It... It was the only thing I could think of."

"But I was here," Qui-Gon repeated, enunciating each word clearly and distinctly. "You should have consulted me first. I would have gone with him," he lied.

He couldn't begin to read the girl, not without probing deeper than was permissible. Emotions warred in her, and fear was the strongest of them. When she said she liked Obi-Wan, he felt sincerity. But, yet... Something wasn't right. It was a cold night, and the ground was damp, the surroundings of the town dense with undergrowth. Despite this, the girl wore no cloak, and her soft leather shoes were unstained by moisture, her long skirts unsnagged by thorns. Her hair was dry and perfectly smooth.

He saw another scenario then, clear and terrible. He saw this dark Master, monitoring their crash and fearing a threat, sending his assassins to capture any survivors. He saw him, angry at that failure, relax when he saw Obi-Wan brought into this town, unable to defend himself, unable to leave. "Let me know the moment anyone comes for him," he would have said to the girl, using honeyed words or mind tricks to convince her that he only wanted to help - that he, Qui-Gon, was the threat. He would have pressed a comlink into her hand, told her how to use it...

He shook his head, banishing the dark imagining. He had no evidence

that it was the truth, and, unlike Obi-Wan, he always distrusted premonitions and elusive and often-deceptive visions. He always filled his awareness with the present, with the living Force of those around him, always.

"Where did they take him?" he asked, at last, letting his hands fall back to his side.

He had lied when he had told her that he would have gone with Obi-Wan. He would not have - but neither would he let his apprentice be taken. He would have fought, to the death if necessary.

So much of this was clouded, but one thing was clear: Obi-Wan was in the hands of evil - of a being utterly consumed by hate. The dark Master had shielded his presence, but he had been unable to shield the shield itself. Reaching out, he touched an area of utter blankness, swirling with darkness. It was like touching a black hole, deeply repulsive and sickening.

No, he would not have gone with Obi-Wan, not then. But now his apprentice was taken, he would go after him, walking into what felt like the very personification of the Dark Side to save him.

\*\*\*\*

Obi-Wan awakened to darkness, still blind, still without the Force. His mind was sluggish; dimly he remembered his Master leaving him, letting him drown in clinging black water. His body was still consumed with pain.

"You're awake."

He recognised the voice at once: it was unmistakable. This was the presence that had made contact with him in the woods. This was the Jedi Master who was his salvation.

"I can't see," he said, desperately. He wasn't talking about mere vision. Without the Force, he was working with a tiny fraction of his senses, blind.

"I know." Sympathetic.

Slowly, barely perceptibly, the room lightened slightly, until he could see the dark-clothed, hooded figure sitting on his bed. His face was turned slightly away, and shaded by the cloak. It was still just too dark to make out any features, even if he had been facing him.

Nothing changed. He was still without the Force, still hurting. Out in the cold, the touch of this mind had seemed warm, infinitely hopeful. Now, in the flesh, the man seemed strangely stiff and awkward. There was none of the comfort and security he had always felt in Qui-Gon's presence, even from the start.

Even desperate, as he was, he would not beg. Why was he so sure that this man could save him? "Who are you?" he asked, instead.

"You..." The man sighed. He seemed to be struggling for words, hesitant, and even embarrassed. "You would hate me if you knew. You've been trained for it."



He had always had a stubborn streak. "I wouldn't," he cried. "I won't."

"You will. It's not your fault - you've been left with no alternative," the man said, sadly. Then, quickly, as if fearing the consequences, "I was a padawan who never finished his training."

He couldn't suppress a horrified gasp. Failed initiates were never to be hated, never to be ridiculed. The Jedi Order was not for everyone, and those who failed to pass the trials were still to be treated with every respect, supported in whatever way they chose to pursue their lives. Yet, even so, the names of those who had failed were never spoken, and every apprentice would rather die than fail to become a Knight.

"You failed the trials?" he asked, unable to believe it. The mind that had touched his, earlier, had seemed so strong, and it was obvious from the girl's words that he had great charisma. He had been sure that this man was a Master. If such a powerful Jedi could fail, then what chance had he, when his time came?

"No." The man shook his head. "I didn't fail them. I never even took them. I... I chose to leave. I had had years suppressing my conscience. In the end, I had to accept that I could no longer do it. My principles came first."

He was beyond words, unable to comprehend it. There was no higher principle, no higher conscience, than the Jedi Code.

"I spent years learning how to use a lightsabre, then yet more years learning why I never should," the man said. His words were like a light coming on. He had said much the same himself to Qui-Gon earlier. Although he knew he was behaved terribly to his Master, although he longed to apologise for his tone, deep down he still felt the same. "I accompanied my Master on mission after mission in which we would stand by and watch evils done, because it was not 'appropriate' to act. I saw people die. A single blow with a lightsabre would have saved them, but I was not allowed even to ignite it. I was to preserve life at all times, even if by preserving the life of one evil-doer, I was causing the eventual death of a hundred innocent people."

Obi-Wan said nothing. The words struck a deep resonance in him. He remembered arguing the same to Qui-Gon many times, when still a boy. What had his Master said? He couldn't remember. Something about him not yet having the knowledge to understand why it was right, but that the greatest minds of centuries had decided that it was right. He remembered being dissatisfied at the time. Why, then, had he forgotten his dissatisfaction ever since?

"There are - what? - ten thousand Jedi in the universe, and how many more worlds?" the man continued, his arguments inescapable. "Even if the Jedi acted to their full capabilities, they would ignore the wrongs on a million worlds. And they do not act to their full abilities. They do not fight. They influence minds only with the strictest of prohibitions. They can read a man's every thought, yet have you ever done that? Have they ever told you that you can do that? No Jedi ever has been allowed to." He paused. His voice was gaining with strength and conviction with every word, and when he

spoke again he was almost shouting. "Yet, if they did, they could find out in a second a secret that could end a terrible war, or find out when a murder was contemplated and stop it."

Everything inside him cried out that this man was wrong, so wrong. This was the Dark Side talking. Almost from birth, he had been taught this, taught not to listen to such arguments. \_It was wrong.\_ His whole world view could permit of no other judgement on the man's words. But, yet...

"I felt brainwashed, violated. I felt that they had shaped me before I even had a mind, had given me my every thought. I tried to tell my Master what I'm telling you now, but he couldn't comprehend it. They take every argument that doesn't agree with their Code and label it "the Dark Side", refusing even to let initiates hear it, to make their own mind up."

What answer could he give? Any argument, and he would label himself as brainwashed. Any word of agreement, and he would be agreeing with a philosophy that everyone he had ever known in his whole life considered to be utterly evil. What could he do? Oh, how he just wanted to sleep, to be free of pain... to be free of this.

The man was relentless. His voice was softer now, and there was a smile in his voice. "I'm not saying this to convince you. \_I\_ do not impose my philosophy on others, or allow no disagreement." His pale hand snaked out from his robe, touching Obi-Wan's hand lightly. "I just want you not to hate me. I left the Jedi out of principles. I considered I was acting for the good."

Obi-Wan closed his eyes, sighing with relief as the pressure fell away with the man's use of the past tense. The Jedi Code was not being challenged. The man was admitting the mistakes of his youth. Perhaps he wanted Obi-Wan to be a mediator, to argue his cause with the Council in his attempt to be re-admitted.

"And now I'm here." The man spread his hands, gesturing to his surroundings. "You heard how these people were suffering - how evil men were preying on their defencelessness, and how the Republic offered no protection. I provide that protection. There is no Jedi Council to discuss the philosophies of my proposed actions, paralysing me. When the slavers come, I can act instantly. I see no reason to mourn if any slavers are killed by my men, as long as the innocent are saved."

Oh, but his words made such sense. They were wrong, but every word of them rang true. Obi-Wan closed his eyes and longed for certainty again - or for the forgetfulness of unconsciousness. He had never been so deeply scared in his whole life. He was breathing in fast panicky breaths, each one torture. He was questioning beliefs that were the very foundation of his life. This was worse, far worse, than losing the Force.

The Force...

The thought filled his mind like a sudden, blazing light. The Force... His mind flooded with remembered calm; his breathing eased a little. He remembered now. His Master's words had not eased his dissatisfaction; the Force had. The first time he had fought with his mind successfully cleansed of anger, fully in tune with the Jedi

code, he had been awed by the power of the Force. It had flowed through him, guided him, overwhelmed him... and yet had consented to be controlled by him, and do his bidding, because what he was doing was right. He had understood then what he had let himself forget: that the Force, not the Council, ruled the Jedi.

But, somewhere, recently, he had lost his way. This last year of tedious missions, chafing ever more against the restrictions, longing for action.... Had he learnt nothing because he had let himself learn nothing? He had been cut off from the Force, forgetting its infinite majesty. He had thought as a young man eager for glory, not as a disciple of the Force. The Force knew that some great future good could result from the most tedious of tiny actions now, and knew also that great evil could be spawned by a single thoughtless act that seemed good at the time. In touch with the Force, he knew this to be true. But when, in the past year, had he been truly at one with the Force?

Only now, without it, did he know - know the Force was in everything he did, and in everything he thought. Life without it was no life at all. Life working contrary to its dictates was even worse.

Relief flooded him. He had his answer, and his certainty. He would not be tempted.

He opened his eyes, and prepared to speak.

But the man was no longer there. He was standing in the door, talking to a newcomer in a soft whisper. The words were barely audible, but he heard enough...

... and everything came crashing down again.

\*\*\*\*

The Dark Jedi would sense him, Qui-Gon knew that. There would be no chance of surprise, no point in stealth.

His only hope came from his belief that his enemy would want to see him die - to see his face as he died. He wouldn't entrust his death to mere subordinates. He would want to kill him himself.

And maybe, just maybe, in a one-on-one battle with a Dark Side Master, he could win...

This way, there was the smallest of hopes. Any other way, and there was none.

He stopped now, beside the doorway in the mountain. The dark shield in front of him was terrible now, filling his mind, taunting him with his ignorance of quite what sort of a man was hiding behind it. Guided by the sense of that terrible absence, he would have come close to this place. Without the girl to guide him, he doubted he would have found the door itself. It was well disguised, shielded by plants. What fortress did this man have, hidden beneath the mountain?

She gestured at him now to be quiet. She stood on tip toe, shouting towards a silent camera. "Tell the Master I've brought him the other one."

The door opened.

He still didn't know if he trusted the girl, but what choice did he have? An innocent dupe of the dark Jedi's tricks, or a willing accomplice, it made no difference. She had led him here. If she bound him and led him even to her Master's presence, he would still have got what he came here for.

He needed to see the face of his enemy.

As he entered the hidden fortress, he couldn't shake off the feeling that he was going to his death.

\*\*\*\*

Obi-Wan was screaming inside:

But he had heard what he heard.

A body had been found - a man, unarmed, who had been working on a shuttle, maintaining it. He had been killed, and the shuttle stolen. The man who brought the news was puzzled, for it was not clear what sort of weapon could have killed in such a way. The man was unmarked, he said, save for a wound right through him of minuscule thinness, and fully cauterised.

A lightsabre wound.

Pictures filled his mind, horrible and hateful - of Qui-Gon rebuking him for his fantasies of fighting, yet killing an unarmed man in cold blood; of Qui-Gon leaving him to drown and bidding him not to follow; of Qui-Gon stealing a craft and leaving the planet, leaving him alone, alone...

A low moan escaped his lips.

"I'm sorry."

He was dimly aware of the man speaking. He wanted to clap his hands over his ears. He wanted none of this to be true. Oh, how he wanted his Master to be here with strong, both of them strong in the Force together, and strong in their bond...

"Just a bit of... business I had to deal with. I'm sorry you had to hear that." The man appeared to gasp suddenly. "I know what you're thinking. It can't be that. It can't be your Master." But his voice carried little conviction.

"I don't want to talk about it." To his own ears he sounded like a sulky little boy. \_ he meant. \_

\_ The man was silent for a moment. "I'm sorry," he said, at last. "I'll talk about something else." He sat down again, took a deep breath, and made an obvious attempt to change the subject. "It's a shame you don't agree with me. I need someone like you." \_

\_ A little incessant voice, clamouring within him. Everything he knew about Qui-Gon cried out that it was not true, but, still... \_

\_ "I have quite an army of my peace-keepers now, but none of them are leaders. They do my bidding well enough, but an army needs more than one general. There are other planets in this sector that need protecting. Soon I'll be ready to help them, too." \_

\_ \_

\_ "Your courage is extraordinary: I saw that when we made contact in the forest. Few Jedi, even, could never have made it that far." Distantly, he felt again that light touch on his hand. He wanted only his Master's touch - but when had his Master praised him like this? "I can tell you are a great fighter, though they don't let you fight enough, and you are very strong in the Force." \_

\_ "Was," he couldn't stop saying, despairingly. "I've lost that now." \_

\_ "Only to regain it, and more so," the man said, confidently. "You're badly hurt; your mind is using all its strength just keeping you alive. You'll get the Force back in a few days - sooner, perhaps." He lowered his voice, confidingly. "When I chose this life, the Force rewarded me tenfold. You got a sense of what I can do now? I was always one of the weakest of padawans." \_

\_ "I was always told that the Dark Side rewards its followers with the appearance of immense power, only to destroy them utterly in the end." But his voice was choked; the words hardly seemed to come from him. He was repeating an old lesson. In his mind, all he could hear was this man saying he needed him, and the small whimpering voice that cried inside him, lamenting the fact that Qui-Gon did not. \_

\_ The man sighed. If he felt any anger at his accusation, he didn't show it. "This is not the Dark Side," he said, and there was hurt in his voice. "If it was, don't you think you would have sensed it, back in the woods? Don't you think the Force would have warned you?" \_

\_ Obi-Wan was silent, lost. \_

\_ "I am not angry," the man said, quietly. "As I said, \_I\_ don't force people to agree with me. I admire you, in fact. You are thinking things through, standing up for yourself. You are not afraid to risk angering me, though you are badly hurt, and you are here with a thousand of my men who would die for me." In the shadows of that hood-shielded face, Obi-Wan got the impression of a slow smile. "I admire such qualities. I \_need\_ such qualities in a general." \_

\_ Words and images welled in his mind in a wild cacophony: "Qui-Gon never needed you"; a year of missions in which he had contributed nothing, useless to his Master; Qui-Gon leaving him for dead; his first experience of fighting with the Force fully as his ally... \_

\_ "But I have tired you. I'm sorry." The man stood up, his voice soft. "You need to sleep. I'll leave you now." \_

\_ But, before he left, he reached into his cloak, pulled something out, and handed it to him. His lightsabre. "Take it," he said. "My men found it in your ship. You are not a prisoner here. I want you to keep it." \_

\_ As his hand closed round the familiar weapon, he felt none of the

comfort that he normally gained from the feel of it - none at all. It almost seemed to burn him. \_

\_ He wanted to drop it. He didn't want to touch it again. \_

\_ \*\*\*\* \_

\_ Qui-Gon had waited alone, his mind empty. No-one had come. The blank darkness that was his enemy was close by, but did not come. Several times, he almost felt the blankness fade, almost made out a recognisable distinct human presence there, but never quite. \_

\_ The girl had gone. \_

\_ Guards stood outside the locked door, their blasters aimed and ready. They had not disarmed him, though. Whether it was an oversight or part of some dark twisted design, he could not tell. \_

\_ Again, the blankness shivered, almost fell away. He smiled grimly at it. His enemy was expending great mental strength in hiding his presence. It was weakening him. Every moment that passed gave him more chance of victory. \_

\_ He would bide his time. The girl had gone, saying she would find Obi-Wan. He wasn't sure he trusted her, but he would give her time. If he did need to fight his way out of this room, it would if he knew where his ultimate goal was. Defeating the Dark Jedi was an extra. Rescuing Obi-Wan was the only thing of any real importance to him. \_

\_ He stood up, and started pacing. \_

\_ Using the Force to unlock the door would be the work of a second. Using his lightsabre to get past the blasters was no challenge at all. He would be ready in an instant. If the girl came back, or if he felt the call of Obi-Wan's mind... \_

\_ He would be ready in an instant. Nothing would stop him. \_

\_ Gripping his lightsabre in readiness, he paced behind the door like a caged tiger. \_

\_ \*\*\*\* \_

\_ When the door opened, Obi-Wan shrank against the wall, knowing what was coming. His mind was battered. He was too weak, too scared, to face another onslaught. The man was trying to tempt him - he was sure of it. Alone, he rejected the Dark Side, but when the man wove his webs of words around him... Oh, but it hurt like the worst pain in his chest, when the man spoke the dictates of the Dark Side and when his words made sense... \_

\_ And so he closed his eyes, and feigned sleep. \_

\_ "He's left you like this?" It was the girl, her voice full of horror... and shame? \_

\_ He blinked sluggishly. Over the last... how long?... he had found his thoughts meandering, slipping away from him like fish. Reality had blurred and shifted. Once he had been sure that his Master had

been here; another time he had stood with a young boy beside him and gazed at a funeral pyre, his face composed but his heart screaming.

\_

\_ A soft hand caressed his forehead, and it was cool, so beautifully cool. "You have a fever, you need water." She worried at his bed clothes, pulling them around. "Your leg needs a fresh bandage, and your ribs need binding. He promised." And there was sudden fury in that last word. \_

\_ "Promised what?" he thought someone said, somewhere, inside him.

\_

\_ "Promised he wouldn't hurt you," she whispered, "if I helped to bring you to him." Her fingers ran across his face. She shook her head ruefully. "But, then, I haven't done what I was supposed to do either." \_

\_ "What was that?" \_

\_ There was an unreality to this whole conversation. He wasn't sure if she was really here. She was very beautiful. He had trained with girls in the Temple, of course, but he had been a child then. Since he was twelve, he had barely spent a single day away from his Master's side. He had noticed girls on their travels, but seldom spoken to them, never been alone with them. A Jedi Knight had no home. While it was not against the code to take a wife, it was unusual. A Knight's family was the Order; a padawan's family was his Master. Shallow attractions of the flesh did not serve the Order, and were not encouraged. \_

\_ He had never touched a girl. \_

\_ Maybe she was a dream, and, if so, it wouldn't matter. Maybe she existed... but then nothing mattered either, for it meant that it was all true, and his was without his Master, and without the Force. \_

\_ Nothing mattered. She was very beautiful... \_

\_ Clumsily, he reached for her face, moving his fingers across her face. \_

\_ She gasped. \_

\_ "Am I hurting you?" He pulled back as if burnt. His throat ached with unshed tears. Had he done it wrong? He had never touched a girl.

\_

\_ She gave a small strange sob. "No." \_

\_ And then she leant forward, and her lips brushed against his, cool and soft. Yearningly, he reached for her, wanting more, but it was the touch of only the tiniest moment, barely there at all, and then gone. \_

\_ She whispered, little more than a breath. "I shouldn't have done that. I'm so sorry, Obi-Wan." \_

\_ He wondered how she knew his name. He was never to know hers. \_

\_ "Do you want her?" And suddenly the man was there, still hooded, still compelling and terrible. "What is wrong with wanting her?" He was by her side in two strides, holding her face in his hand, his fingers squeezing her cheeks. "She is beautiful, isn't she? What is wrong with wanting her? But the Jedi won't allow you to have her. It is part of the brainwashing. They marry you to the Order. You must have no personal attachments no happiness... no life that is not regulated by the Jedi." \_

\_ But something was different this time. He could barely concentrate - barely hold the thread of a single sentence. Arguments slipped from his mind like water. \_

\_ "Join me, and you can have her." The man was shouting, now. "You can have power. You can do good. You can fight - and save more people than you ever could have as a Jedi..." \_

\_ Why was his voice shaking? \_

\_ "No!" The girl reached out a hand, imploring. "It's a trap! Don't listen to him. He's losing. He hasn't much time..." \_

\_ And then the semi-darkness of the room was rent apart with fire. A red lightsabre blazed, slashed, and was extinguished. With the smallest of moans, the girl fell, and was still. \_

\_ He was shocked beyond belief; the last of the man's snares shrivelled and fell away. He stood revealed, now - a Dark Jedi Master, able to cloak his evil in the sweetest of words. \_

\_ And evil had to be destroyed.... \_

\_ "No!" he cried. The sight of the girl's body was burnt on his retinas, imprinted there by the sudden burst of light in the gloom. He could still taste her lips on his. "No!" \_

\_ Pushing himself from the bed, he launched himself at the man. Anger kept him on his feet, gave him strength despite the pain. Clenching his fist, he landed a blow on the man's chest with all his strength, then another in his stomach. He thought of all the evils he had ever seen. This man was the personification of them all. In his imagination on the ship the night before, he had fought a Dark Lord, and killed him. Now he would do it in reality, too. Smiling, he raised his fist again.... \_

\_ \_

\_ Yes, oh yes, his lightsabre... He remembered the triumph of slashing through the Sith Lord with his blazing weapon, and seeing him fall. It was symbolic. He would use light to wipe out darkness, atoning for the past, aligning himself once again and immovably with the Light Side. \_

\_ Slowly, gleefully, he ignited the weapon, raised it.... \_

\_ ... and felt cold sheeting horror like a wave pass through him. What had he almost done? Oh, what had he almost done? To strike down an unresisting man... To fight, even at all, in anger... \_

\_ His hand shaking, but steady in his mind, he raised the weapon



before his face, as if saluting his enemy in a gesture half- mocking.  
\_ he was saying. \_ \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Then he extinguished it, and stood in the darkness, racked with pain, but his head held high. "I will not strike you down," he said, aloud. "I will fight to defend myself, but never like this. \_I will not turn.\_" \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ And, as he said it, it was as if his whole world shifted, as if the very basis of his perception changed. For the first time since the crash, he was without fear, confident that, whatever else had gone wrong, he was acting as he ought. It was like a light coming on. His mind shifted. He had thought he was without the Force; now he saw that the man's mind had been touching his for the whole time - that he had built a barrier in his mind. He had been trapped behind a door that he believed was locked, but now he saw that it had been unlocked for the whole time. He was trapped in the dark water, yearning for the sun, unable to move. Now he saw what was holding him back, it was the easiest thing in the world to move, to reach for the light... to attain it. \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ The Force flooded into his mind, radiant and beautiful. He felt the twisted darkness of the man before him, terrible, yet pitiful, too. He felt, too, his Master's presence cry out in sudden recognition, his whole being focused on him, his mind overflowing with concern and love. \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ "I will not turn," he said, again, and meant it with his whole soul. He cast his lightsabre away with all the strength he could muster. \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ "But he will not have you, one way or the other," the man hissed. Raising his fist, he lashed out suddenly, catching Obi-Wan on his broken ribs. Immense pain blossomed in his entire body; breathing was an impossibility. Another blow fell, and another... \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ The last thing he knew was the door bursting open, and his Master was there, green lightsabre blazing. He heard one word - "Xanatos" - and then nothing. \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ \*\*\*\* \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ There was no fight. For an enmity that had lasted fifteen years, there was no epic ending. \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ His former apprentice whirled round with his red lightsabre, landing one clumsy blow on Qui-Gon's weapon, easily deflected. His face was grey and drained. Qui-Gon knew now what had been causing the barrier he had felt in Obi-Wan's mind. The Light Side did not permit the exercise of such powers. If the Dark Side did - as it surely had to - it was not without immense cost. Xanatos was barely holding himself upright on his feet. \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ But he was still wily, still intensely dangerous. How many had died after he had slipped away after their last confrontation? How many would die in the future if he lived? \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Qui-Gon hesitated only for a second. He fought to kill. \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Two slashes later, and it was over. \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Stepping over the body of his former apprentice, sparing him not the slightest thought, Qui-Gon gently lifted Obi-Wan's limp body and held him close. For the first time in many years, he wept. \_\_\_

\_\_\_ \*\*\*\* \_\_\_

\_\_\_ Qui-Gon was an unstoppable force. He strode through the shattered remains of Xanatos's organisation, implacable. "I am your Master now," he declared. No-one dared stop him as he ordered a ship to be made ready, as he ordered medical supplies, as he sent a message to the Republic. \_\_\_

\_\_\_ For an hour, everything was in his hands. Xanatos' officers obeyed him; the town's Council wanted to negotiate with him. \_\_\_

\_\_\_ At the end of the hour, he was gone. \_\_\_

\_\_\_ \*\*\*\* \_\_\_

\_\_\_ Obi-Wan studied his Master for a long time, as he sat in profile, his eyes distant, lost in thought. \_\_\_

\_\_\_ "Why didn't you stay?" he said, at last. It was still so hard to talk. His lung had been pierced, and he had almost died - Qui-Gon had told him that much. He was out of danger now, but healing would be long and difficult, his mind far harder to heal, perhaps, than his body. Even though, awake, he could feel the Force moving in him stronger than it had ever been, anchoring him with a deep core of peace, his nights were still full of shadows and dreams of taunting voices. Every night he awakened several times, convinced that his Master had left him. \_\_\_

\_\_\_ "There was a lot of the sense of Xanatos there," Qui-Gon said, quietly. "Even after his death. I didn't want you waking up still there. I needed to get you to safety. It was the most important thing for me." \_\_\_

\_\_\_ He didn't understand. A Jedi knew always that his own life was subordinate to the mission. Xanatos had a large army, he knew, yet Qui-Gon had left his lieutenants alone, free to rebuild and regroup. A Republic party was preparing to visit the planet and mop up the Dark Jedi's forces, but before they could land they would have to negotiate terms with the colonists, and that would likely take weeks. A whole army could slip away in that time, or go to war. Qui-Gon should have stayed. \_\_\_

\_\_\_ "No." Qui-Gon smiled gently, and reached for the younger man's hand, squeezing it gently. They were sharing thoughts again, closer than they had ever been in this last year. "The mission is saving lives. A Jedi is always prepared to die for others, but he should also know when a single life is worth more than anything. We are not cold pragmatists, Obi-Wan. If we sacrifice our own, needlessly, uncaring, we are no better than our enemies. Our strength comes from the living Force - from saving lives." \_\_\_

\_\_\_ Qui-Gon took a deep breath, shrugged, and the intensity of the moment passed. "Besides, I know Xanatos. He always liked the control everything, to be in charge. He would have controlled every last detail of his organisation, recruiting men for muscle, not for their

minds. We could leave them for a year, and they will still be in chaos, milling around without a head." He tried to smile. \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Obi-Wan refused to let go. Ever since he had awakened, he had had dark dreams of Xanatos's death. He had not seen it, and Qui-Gon had not told him what had happened. "I killed him," he had said, tersely, and that was all. "I did not kill the other man, though. That was a lie. I only knocked him out. But I killed Xanatos." Without the truth, Obi-Wan had had to imagine. Had it been hard for Qui-Gon to choose? How much had he sensed of his own battle with the Dark Side, of his own most terrible temptation? If he had sensed nothing, would he reject him when he knew? \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ "Please tell me," he said, now, reaching for his Master's sleeve. "I need to know how he died." \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Qui-Gon closed his eyes. "I killed him," he said, his voice low. Then he opened his eyes, and they were shining with moisture. "I wept, Obi-Wan, but not at his death. I wept at how close I came to losing you, and how you would be dying without hearing me apologise about that night on the ship." \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ "I was wrong," Obi-Wan said at once. "All those things I said... Xanatos said them too. I was close to the Dark Side. I... I was tempted." His voice caught on a sob. "I came close to turning, Master." \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ "No." Fierce. Qui-Gon held his hand in both of his, wrapping him in his calming presence. "Never think that. I was there with you, somehow, for the last part of it at least. You were barely alive; he built a clever trap for you with his words. You never came close to joining him." \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ "But I nearly killed him in anger." \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Qui-Gon swallowed hard. "I did kill him in anger." He raised his head, and his eyes were clear. "I do not regret it. I believe it was necessary, and that the Force would have guided my hand, had I sought it, but I did not. I was defending you, but not from any immediate threat, and he was no threat to me at that time. He could barely stand. I was not fighting in defence, no." \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Obi-Wan didn't know what to think. Did his Master mean it to be comforting, to reveal that he, too, had looked to his Dark Side - that they had failed together? Instead, he found it deeply disturbing. His Master had always been beyond reproach to him.

\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ "Listen to me, Obi-Wan." Qui-Gon spoke quickly, intense. "Look inside yourself. Look to the Force... Do you really believe that Xanatos should have been spared?" He paused for a moment. "The Council may see it otherwise, but I can feel no regret for it. And I do not believe that everything he said to you - that everything you said to me that night - comes from the Dark Side. The Dark Side speaks some truths, or how else would it have power over men's minds? I believe we have become too mindful of the future, too afraid to act. I believe that sometimes we allow a greater evil by our refusal to interfere without interrogating our every motive. I feel the universe growing darker, and I think that, sometimes, we do need to fight." \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ A few days ago, he had heard such sentiments, and almost agreed with them. Now, though, remembering the horror of the Dark Jedi that uttered them, how could he even think them again? The idea repulsed him. He would be cautious, heeding all warnings, mindful always of the unifying Force. He would be obedient to the Council, and the Code. How could he not? Any defiance, and he would remember again the terrifying horror of knowing that he had teetered on the brink of turning... \_\_\_

\_\_\_ But what had it done to his Master? They had changed places utterly in the space of a few days. For years, his Master had been the conduit for the Jedi Code. Now, he had killed a man in anger, and counted the life of one man as more important than his duty. He was talking, too, of defying the Council, of pushing for changes... \_\_\_

\_\_\_ "I have been the teacher for too long, Obi-Wan," his Master said now, "passing on accepted wisdom, teaching you as the Council would wish. But you are a man now. In my mind, you are almost a Knight. There is little more I can teach you. Now I want to be a Knight myself, and not merely a teacher. I will act on my own conscience. You may not always like what I do." \_\_\_

\_\_\_ He said it simply, stating it as fact, but then suddenly his face darkened, his voice dropped. "I realised something when I held you, then - when I killed Xanatos. Maybe that's why I wept." His eyes were glistening now, too. "I told you once that Xanatos could no longer hurt me. I realised in that moment that I had been wrong. Xanatos has cast a deep shadow over my life, Obi-Wan. He has made me too cautious, too fearful of the Dark Side. I have considered my actions too deeply, scared that any instinct could lead to the Dark Side, as it did with him. I have lived fifteen years with his shadow; now I am free of him." \_\_\_

\_\_\_ He felt deeply uncomfortable. His Master was smiling, but apprehension twisted inside him. He had a sudden flash of vision - of his Master defying the Council again and again; of a final rift because of it - a rift that, this time, would end in death before it was fully healed. He had a sudden flash of vision... and then it was gone. \_\_\_

\_\_\_ "I am free of the past, Obi-Wan," Qui-Gon said again, and this time he smiled. "I feel there is nothing I can not do, now - nothing I dare not attempt." He smiled again. "Nothing we can not do, Obi-Wan. I... I requested easy assignments this last year, seeing the restlessness in you, fearing... fearing, I know now, the shadow of Xanatos in you. I wronged you, I see now." He bowed his head, and squeezed his apprentice's hand. "His shadow was in me all along, and never in you. You will never turn, Obi-Wan." \_\_\_

\_\_\_ A few days ago, such words would have been all he needed. Now, though, he was troubled. He had come too close. He wondered if the shadow would ever quite lift. \_\_\_

\_\_\_ But he smiled, and tried to remember the moment of the purest joy - when he had regained the Force and felt his Master's presence, focused only on him... \_\_\_

\_\_\_ "Only on you, Obi-Wan," his Master said now, echoing his

thoughts. "I would die for you - you know that. And I know that you would die for me." \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ At least that closeness remained. They could still share thoughts. The rift of the last year had been healed utterly....

\_\_\_\_ But what else had shifted? What had taken its place? \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ His Master's approval was not enough now - not enough to give him peace of mind. He needed something else, but what? \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ "Rest, now, Obi-Wan," Qui-Gon murmured. "I won't leave you."

\_\_\_\_ Perhaps he would sleep. Perhaps he would be free of dark dreams. Perhaps everything would be back as it should be in the morning.

\_\_\_\_ Perhaps... \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Obi-Wan slept. \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ \*\*\*\* \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Qui-Gon laid his cloak over his sleeping apprentice, and smiled.

\_\_\_\_ \*\*\*\* \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ END \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ \*\*\*\* \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Feedback is eagerly welcomed, and replied to, at [Musgrove@astolat.demon.co.uk](mailto:Musgrove@astolat.demon.co.uk) \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ This is my first Star Wars fanfic (though not my first fanfic) - and I haven't even seen the film yet! It is dedicated to Rebecca, a good friend who has seen it - nine times. On holiday together last month, both deep in our obsession, we started writing serial stories for each other. This one is mine; hers she intends to keep private and not post. However, I just want to go on record as saying that she has written one of the most powerful scenes I could ever hope to read. \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ \_  
\_\_\_\_ \_  
\_\_\_\_ \_  
\_\_\_\_ \_  
\_\_\_\_ \_  
\_\_\_\_ \_  
\_\_\_\_ \_  
\_\_\_\_ \_  
\_\_\_\_ \_  
\_\_\_\_ \_  
\_\_\_\_ \_  
\_\_\_\_ \_

End  
file.